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General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

309th meeting

Monday, 28 March 2011, 3 p.m.

New York

Chair: Mr. Zinsou ..... (Benin)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Opening of the session

The Chair: I declare open the 2011 organizational session of the Disarmament Commission.

Expression of sympathy in connection with the natural disaster in Japan

The Chair: I should like at the outset to take this opportunity to express our sincere condolences to and solidarity with the people and the Government of Japan in view of the terrible natural disaster that has befallen their country. We are confident that the people of Japan will be able to overcome the tragic consequences of this crisis with resilience and determination.

Draft provisional agenda for the 2011 organizational session of the Disarmament Commission (A/CN.10/L.66)

The Chair: As in past years, the Commission has convened today for a brief session to deal with organizational matters, including the election of a Chair and of other members of the Bureau for the 2011 session. I wish now to draw the Commission's attention to the provisional agenda for this organizational session as contained in document A/CN.10/L.66.

I should like to inform the Commission of a correction to item 5 of the draft provisional agenda. The word "Draft" should be deleted; the item should therefore read "Provisional agenda for the 2011 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission".

It is a simple agenda, but I would ask whether members have any comments on it.

There being none, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to adopt the draft provisional agenda as contained in document A/CN.10/L.66, as orally revised.

The agenda, as orally revised, was adopted.

Election of the Chair

The Chair: In accordance with the established practice of rotation, it is the Group of Asian States that has the honour to nominate the candidate for the post of Chair of the Commission for its 2011 session. I have received an official communication from the Chair of that Group informing me that the Group has reached an agreement on the nomination of Ambassador Hamid Al Bayati, Permanent Representative of Iraq, as a candidate for the chairmanship of the Commission for its 2011 session.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that it is the wish of the Commission to elect Mr. Hamid Al Bayati as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Chair: On behalf of the Commission and on my own behalf, I congratulate Mr. Hamid Al Bayati, Permanent Representative of Iraq, on his election to

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this high position. I am sure that I express a commonly shared view when I say that we look forward to benefiting from his broad experience and diplomatic skills. We wish him success in discharging his newly assumed important duties. For our part, we will remain at his service, providing support and counsel as need be.

I now invite Mr. Hamid Al Bayati to take the Chair.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq) took the Chair.

Statement by the Chair

The Chair: At the outset, allow me to express my gratitude to the members of the Commission for having elected me Chair of the Disarmament Commission and for having entrusted to me the important task of chairing this organizational session. I also want to thank them for the kind words and wishes addressed to me. I count on the support and cooperation of all Member States in achieving the important goals ahead of the Commission.

Before we turn to the next item on the agenda, allow me to pay well deserved tribute to Ambassador Jean-Francis Régis Zinsou for the excellent guidance and leadership he provided as Chair of the Commission at its 2010 substantive session. My gratitude also goes to other members of the Bureau for their valiant and tireless efforts.

Finally, I thank delegations for their constructive spirit and cooperation during the previous session of the Commission.

Election of other officers

The Chair: As is the case with the Chair, the other officers of the Bureau are elected on the basis of the established principle of rotation. Accordingly, it is the turn of the Group of African States to nominate the Rapporteur of the Commission for the 2011 substantive session and one Vice-Chair.

I suggest that we now proceed to the election of Vice-Chairs. I have been informed that consultations are still going on within the Group of African States, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and the Group of Western European and other States on possible candidates for the posts of Vice-Chairs and Rapporteur. We can address this issue at a later stage.

As for the candidates for Vice-Chairs from the Group of Eastern European States, I wish to inform the Commission that the Group has successfully concluded its consultations and that I have received an official communication from it endorsing Mr. Gheorghe Leucă of the Republic of Moldova and Mr. Miloš Nikolić of Montenegro as Vice-Chairs for the Group of Eastern European States.

If I hear no comment, I will take it that the Commission wishes to elect Mr. Gheorghe Leucă of the Republic of Moldova and Mr. Miloš Nikolić of Montenegro as Vice-Chairs of the Commission for the 2011 substantive session by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Chair: On behalf of the Commission, I warmly congratulate the elected officers and wish them success in discharging their duties. I look forward to working with them and other fellow Bureau members.

Organizational matters

The Chair: As members of the Commission are aware, the General Assembly adopted a resolution that has specific bearing on the work of the Commission. For the sake of clarity and for the benefit of the members of the Commission, I would like to refer to that resolution. Resolution 65/86, entitled "Report of the Disarmament Commission", was adopted by the General Assembly on 8 December 2010 under sub-item (a) of agenda item 99. The relevant paragraphs of the draft resolution, namely, paragraphs 7 and 8, read as follows:

> "that the Disarmament Commission continue the consideration of the following items at its substantive session of 2011:
>
> "(a) Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons;
>
> "(b) Elements of a draft declaration of the 2010s as the fourth disarmament decade;
>
> "(c) Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons. This item will be taken up upon the conclusion of the preparation of the elements of a draft declaration of the 2010s as the fourth disarmament decade, preferably in 2010 and in any case no later than 2011;

"Requests the Disarmament Commission to meet for a period not exceeding three weeks during 2011, namely from 4 to 22 April, and to submit a substantive report to the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session".

I have just outlined the resolution that contains the mandate for the upcoming work of the Disarmament Commission.

Draft provisional agenda for the 2011 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission (A/CN.10/L.65)

The Chair: As members will note, the draft provisional agenda includes three substantive items, namely, items 4, 5 and 6. As members are aware, at the start of the three-year cycle of the Commission in 2009, we had a long discussion on the substantive agenda items of the Commission and ultimately reached a consensus formulation, which is reflected in item 6, which reads as follows:

"Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons (this item will be taken up after the elements of a draft declaration of the 2010s as the fourth disarmament decade have been prepared, preferably in 2010 and in any case no later than 2011)."

Since we have reached the end of the thee-year cycle and we are in the year of 2011, I would like to open the floor for an exchange of views on items 5 and 6, which are inseparably linked to this formulation. Depending on the outcome of our discussion, we may be able to take a decision as to the number of substantive items and working groups for the 2011 session.

Mr. Cassidy (Indonesia): At the outset, I would like, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Chair of the Disarmament Commission at this year's very important session. I also congratulate the other members of the Bureau on their elections. NAM looks forward to participating in and contributing actively to this session of the Disarmament Commission, which will be positive and will generate tangible outcomes, under the very able stewardship of you, Mr. Chair, and your team.

I now wish to convey NAM's position with regard to the Chair's queries on items 4, 5 and 6 of the draft provisional agenda. First of all, starting this year there will be three agenda items instead of two. Members of NAM hope there will be no parallel meetings of the Working Groups. We also expect that the issues discussed within the Working Groups will be taken into account in an equal manner.

NAM would like to express its commitment to constructive engagement and cooperation with all countries. We hope that we will all demonstrate political will to make meaningful advances on the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation agenda.

The Chair: Unless there are any other comments, I shall take it that it is the consensus of the Commission to establish three Working Groups?

It was so decided.

The Chair: It is my understanding that the Commission has reached a consensus by which the 2011 substantive session of the Commission will include three substantive agenda items, namely, "Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons", "Elements of a draft declaration of the 2010s as the fourth disarmament decade" and "Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons". Unless I hear any objection, I shall take it that the Commission decides to include those items on its agenda.

It was so decided.

The Chair: May I also take it that the Commission decides to establish a third Working Group, on item 6 of its agenda?

It was so decided.

The Chair: In that connection, I would like to inform delegations that the Chair of Working Group I, Mr. Paolo Cuculi of Italy, has been reassigned by his Government and has left New York. I therefore urge the Group of Western European and other States to conduct the necessary consultations to find a replacement Chair for Working Group I as soon as possible, in view of the fact that we are only a few days away from the start of the Commission's 2011 substantive session.

I was also informed by the Chair of the Working Group on elements of a draft declaration that he would be unable to perform his functions because he has also been appointed Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004), a task which, as the Commission is aware, is all-consuming. This means that the Group of African States will need also to decide on a replacement for the Chair for the Working Group on elements of a draft declaration.

Since we are opening a third substantive agenda item on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons, I would urge the Group of Eastern European States and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States to conduct the necessary consultations among and within those groups to nominate a candidate for Chair of the Working Group on conventional weapons. Again, I would like to emphasize the urgency of this matter in view of the forthcoming session.

Organizational matters

The Chair: As the Commission has decided to establish a third Working Group, a programme for the Working Group will now be distributed in the room.

The Disarmament Commission is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly that meets annually. Its sessions are financed from regular budgets and do not require additional funding. Moreover, in accordance with decision 52/492, of 8 September 1998, the annual substantive sessions of the Commission should last three weeks. As a result, during the 2011 session, the Commission will work on the basis of our usual practice, namely, a full three-week session. With that in mind, the Secretariat has arranged that the dates of the 2011 substantive session of the Commission will be from 4 to 22 April. The last day of the third week will be Friday, 22 April. As that date coincides with Good Friday, there will be no meeting on that day.

May I take it the members of the Commission agree to adjust the schedule for this session accordingly?

It was so decided.

The Chair: I should like to note that, in accordance with established practice, all organizational matters should be concluded at the organizational session of the Disarmament Commission. Unfortunately, as I have already informed the Commission, we are not in a position to conclude these organizational matters in view of the following outstanding vacancies: the Rapporteur and one Vice-Chair from the Group of African States; two Vice-Chairs from the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, two Vice-Chairs from the Group of Western European and other States and, finally, the three Chairs of Working Groups I, II and III.

As members will appreciate, this is a tall order. I would like to take the opportunity to urge the regional groups concerned to conduct all the necessary consultations in order to enable the Commission to start its substantive work as planned.

Accordingly, it may be advisable for the Commission to conclude this organizational session to give the Bureau and delegations time to carry out further consultations on these issues and to take them into consideration at an appropriate time.

I shall now give the floor to members who wish to make comments on the draft programme of work.

Mr. Roscoe (United Kingdom): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of your extremely important post. I wish you and the other members of the Bureau well in our forthcoming meetings.

I have a purely procedural question about the draft general programme of work, specifically the draft provisional agenda (A/CN.10/L.65). In item 6, the point is made fairly explicitly that this item will be taken up after the elements of a draft declaration for the 2010's as the fourth disarmament decade have been prepared and concluded. However, the programme of work shows that some of the Working Group meetings on that item are scheduled at the same time as some of the other Working Group meetings on items 4 and 5. I wonder whether the Secretariat could explain to us how they reconcile those two issues.

The Chair: I now give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Cherniavsky (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): The Secretariat definitely faced quite a difficult task because, as members are aware, a package deal was adopted in 2009 for these three substantive items. There were two conditions attached to item 3, which some members may find to be somewhat mutually

exclusive. The first condition is that the third item would be taken up following the consideration of the item on the elements of the declaration.

The other condition is that the item should be taken up no later than 2011. We have only three weeks for this session. It is my understanding that it is entirely up to the Commission to decide how to distribute those items. At the least, it should not start one Working Group meeting until the other has finished. It is also my understanding, on the basis of what I heard from the representative of the Non-Aligned Movement, that the only requirement was not to hold parallel meetings of the Working Groups. We did not hear comments on any other issues. The issue raised by the representative of the United Kingdom should be addressed by Commission, as it is in charge of its own procedures.

Mr. Roscoe (United Kingdom): First of all, I would like to say that I completely support the position of the Non-Aligned Movement that we should not hold parallel meetings of the Working Groups. I think that it makes perfect sense to attempt to have them in sequence. I do wonder, though, given the decision of the Commission, whether we should perhaps front-load the two Working Groups related to provisional agenda items 4 and 5, and move item 6 towards the end of the session. That would at least give us a chance to meet the objective of first deciding on the draft declaration before beginning work on the practical confidence-building measures. That is just one option, but it is what we might suggest.

The Chair: Following the comments of the representative of the United Kingdom, I would ask the Secretariat to amend the draft programme of work. We will then give Commission members the revised version at our next meeting, on 4 April.

If there are no other pressing issues to discuss, I shall take it that it is the wish of the Disarmament Commission to conclude its 2011 organizational session and to resume the unfinished organizational business at the first meeting of the Disarmament Commission, on 4 April.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.